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Response Paper: Barn Burning

In life, there are many situations where one may have to ask the question, Do I stay loyal to my family, or loyal to moral and ethical codes that society has constructed for us? In other words, when does one decide that their family has gone to far with their adverse way of living, and begin to live by the code of law that their society lives by. In *Barn Burning* by William Faulkner, Sartoris, son of Abner Snopes an arsonist, must make the tough choice between staying loyal to his blood, even though his blood is engaging in illegal activity, or abiding by society’s law to keep everyone safe, even though that means turning his back on his family. Clearly this isn’t an easy decision for anyone to make, especially for a ten year old. *Barn Burning* illustrates the conflict between following family virtues which may lack morals, or following the virtues society constructs for us.

In the beginning of *Barn Burning*, Snopes is on trial for the crime of burning Mr. Harris’s barn. Sartoris is then asked to testify against his father, knowing very well that his father expects him to lie on his behalf in order to protect his family, “His father stiff in his black sunday coat donned not for the trial but for the moving did not even look at him. *He aims for me to lie* he thought again and again with frantic grief and despair. *And I will have to do hit*” (Faulkner 4). This quote shows that Sartoris understands that he owe’s a certain degree of loyalty to his father and his family, but at the same time, he knows his action of lying breaks the law and is ethically and morally wrong by the standards of his society. Thus illustrating an example of Sartoris taking his family’s side and complying with his father’s warning of being loyal towards his “blood” because their family is so detached from normal society that he will find him self alone.

Towards the end of the short story, Sartoris’s ideals begin to change. He soon realizes the lack of normalcy his family dynamic has, and that his family’s virtues aren’t very noble. As a result, he begins to conform to the morals and ethics of his society. When their family moves to their new town, Snopes yet again, plans to burn another barn. Sartoris decides to go against his father and warn de Spain about his barn. As a result, Snopes is shot, and Sartoris is free from the moral and ethical burden his father dumped on his shoulders, “He went on down the hill, toward the dark woods within which the liquid silver voices of the birds called unceasing-- the rapid and urgent beating of the urgent and quiring heart of the late spring night. He did not look back” (Faulkner 25).

In conclusion, Sartoris had a tough decision to make in Faulkner’s *Barn Burning*. He had to choose between defending his father and remaining loyal to his family or going against his father in order to remain loyal to societies moral and ethical beliefs. In the end he chose to stay loyal to society. As he matured through out the story, be made the decision that society’s morals and ethics were the one’s to live by, and his fathers virtues isolated their family from a normal potentially happier life.